

PEER PRESSURE



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The Pressure you get from Other Kids

Has a friend every tried to pressure you into doing something that you didn't want to do? That's called peer pressure, and if it hasn't happened to you yet, it's bound to happen to you sometime during middle school or high school.

Peer pressure can be either positive or negative. Positive peer pressure can change things for the good. Negative can change things for the worse. Say you've started hanging out with a bad crowd and you're getting into trouble. If your old friends pressure you to ditch the troublemakers and hang with them again, that's positive peer pressure.

But say a popular girl you want to impress asks you to help her shoplift from a store. You know it's wrong and you're afraid of getting caught. You start to say no but join in after she calls you a chicken.

Or say there's a new kid at school. You've met him because he moved into a house on your street. You think he's nice, but your friends say he's weird, so you ignore him at school.

Not good.

That's why we are bringing you this special newspaper supplement. We're hoping to provide you with enough information about positive and negative peer pressure, so that you can make informed decisions and choices when approached by your friends. We all want to be liked and it's very important to have friends... but not when these are achieved at the expense of someone else. We hope you enjoy this piece and some of the fun activities inside. We'd also like to hear your thoughts on the issue of peer pressure so that we can share them with other kids your age. *Address your letters and comments to:* Kimberly Fabrizio, NIE Coordinator, Times Publishing Company, 205 West 12th Street, Erie, PA 16534. Can't wait to hear from you!

The Power of Friends

Peer pressure is a powerful force -- especially in your middle school years. It's something we all have to deal with. And everyone gives in to it sometimes -- even adults! (Have you ever seen your parents buy something they couldn't afford just because their friends have one?) **To get you started, here are a few ideas for handling peer pressure:**

- Don't put yourself in situations where you have to make an on-the-spot decision. If you know the kids are heading into a house to do things you don't want to do, don't go with them.
- Express your feelings honestly. People usually respect someone who speaks up to say, "I don't feel good about this."
- Say a flat "no". Don't feel you have to give reasons, or defend them.

The Importance of Peers

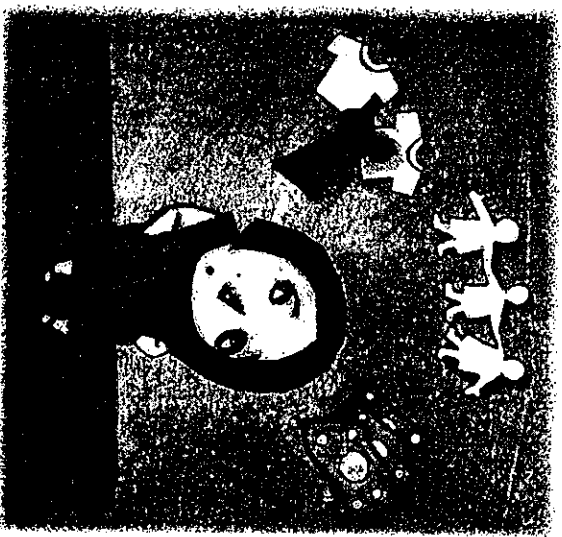
When you were little, the most important people in the world to you were your parents. As you go through life, your friends become more and more important. Sometimes, you may even feel closer to your friends than to your family.

It's normal to feel that way. Part of growing up is, little by little, becoming independent from the adults who are raising you. You still love them -- you just don't need them in the same way. Today, you are searching for a place in a peer group, the group of boys and girls your age.

Who you are in that group will become part of your identity -- part of the way you think about yourself.

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The Need to be Liked

It's natural to care about the way others in the peer group see you. You want to be accepted and liked. So you may find yourself dressing or talking or acting the way your peers do -- even if it's different from the way people in your family dress and talk and act.

Many kids have a special best friend. You may spend a lot of time together doing things you both enjoy, and sharing your hopes and worries. You two may stay best friends for a lifetime -- or until next week. That's normal, too. There's so much change going on in both of you that growing apart is as likely as growing together.

If you and your friend do grow apart, keep in mind that others around you have been growing and changing too. Maybe that boy or girl you didn't like last year will be your new best friend.

CHECK OUT THE NEWS!

1. Everyone has peers: adults and kids alike. People can have different sets of peers based on their interests. Everyone is part of more than one group. Pick a person in the news in today's *Morning News*. Make a list of all the peers the person could have, based on the groups he/she belongs to. Who could make the longest list?

2. Look again at the list for your newsmaker in question 1. Which of his/her peer groups would probably exert the most pressure on him/her? Write a sentence explaining why.

3. Peer groups often form around entertainment tastes. Look through the ads and stories in *Showcase* and find three peer groups you would like to belong to. Base your decision on the music, films, or TV shows you like. As a class, compare answers.

How Much do you have in Common?



How much alike are you and your best friend? And how much pressure does that put on you to be like him/her? Here is a quiz you can take together to measure your compatibility. At the end, write a sentence describing what positive or negative peer pressure you feel from this friendship.

1. My favorite thing to do on a weekend is:
 - a. go to a party
 - b. spend time with a small group of friends
 - c. be alone
 - d. do lots of different things
2. When I get upset, it's usually over:
 - a. my grades
 - b. my looks
 - c. the opposite sex
 - d. family problems
3. My dream vacation would be:
 - a. the beach
 - b. an African safari
 - c. hiking in the wilderness
 - d. shows and shopping in New York City
4. My favorite subject in school is:
 - a. English
 - b. History or Social Studies
 - c. Science
 - d. Math
5. If I'm interested in the opposite sex, I:
 - a. try to talk to them and show my interest
 - b. watch them from afar and hope
 - c. plan to be in the same places they are
 - d. ask a friend to find out if they like me.
6. If I got \$200 for my birthday, I would:
 - a. put it away for college
 - b. splurge on something awesome
 - c. enjoy spending it on a lot of small things
 - d. put it toward some big item that I'm saving for
7. When there's a new fad at school, I'm usually:
 - a. the first to wear it or do it
 - b. the last to know or care
 - c. somewhere in the middle of the crowd

Preparing for Peer Pressure:

Think of a real situation in which you have felt peer pressure. Or imagine such a situation. Work through this activity.

You'll be preparing yourself to deal with similar situations in the future.

- My friends want me to...
- But I don't want to because...
- What do I risk by going along?
- What do I risk or lose by resisting?
- Which is less risky, going along or resisting?
- If I could say to these friends what I truly feel, I would say....
- Why can't I be honest with them about how I feel?
- I could try a little humor or exaggeration to get me out of this (such as, "If I drink that, I'll throw up and it won't be pretty"). I could say...
- I could use the old "parents' excuse (such as, "My parents would ground me"), I could say...



Fitting in with Others

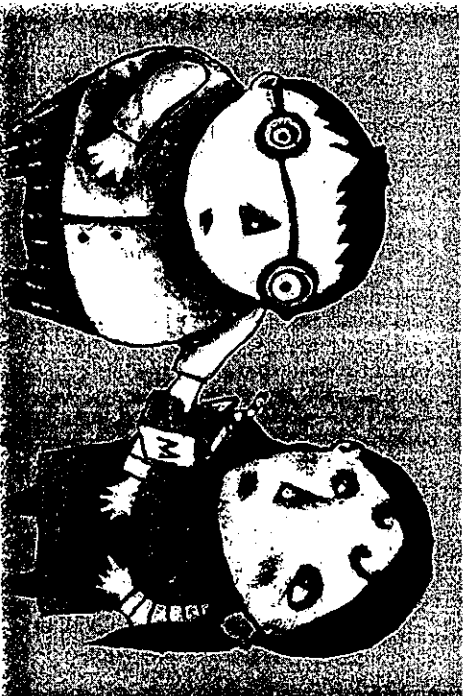
The Pressure to Be Popular

Are you popular? Unpopular?

Somewhere in between? Being popular means being well-liked by the people around you. Some people your age feel that being popular is very important.

What makes a person popular? Most often, it's a friendly personality. People generally like you if you speak and behave in ways that show you like them.

All of us are at least a little shy, a little afraid of being rejected if we approach someone new. When a friendly person approaches us, we're grateful. They made the effort; they took the risk. How could you not like someone who would do that?



Talk It Up

An important part of friendliness is talking. Talking to other people. If you're sitting next to someone in band, or on the bench in sports, or in the cafeteria, the interests you share give you topics to talk about. Ask the other person his or her opinion of something related to what you're doing. Ask a question that requires a longer answer, not one they can just say "yes" or "no" to.

Okay, you could be friendlier, you say — but aren't most popular people good looking and well-off? Well, some of them are. But people who are good looking or well off may not be as confident as they look. They may worry that no one likes them for who they really are inside.

No matter how popular or unpopular a person is, everyone wants good friends who like them for who they really are. A popular person may hang out with a larger group than a person who isn't popular. But popular people don't necessarily have more really good friends.

It takes time and effort to develop good friendships. A person who thinks he or she has to win a popularity contest by constantly making more and more friends to hang out with may not find the time to develop the deeper friendships that really count.

Popularity Up Close

In the spaces on the right, list three people who are popular (other than yourself). Then answer the following questions. At the end, compare your answers for the three people. What can you conclude from the information?

1. Name _____
☐ stranger ☐ someone you know but aren't close to ☐ good friend

List the top three qualities that makes this person popular. Circle Y (yes) or (N) no to show whether this is a quality you admire.

a. _____ Y N b. _____ Y N c. _____ Y N

If you don't like this person, what don't you like about him or her?

2. Name _____

☐ stranger ☐ someone you know but aren't close to ☐ good friend

List the top three qualities that makes this person popular.

a. _____ Y N b. _____ Y N c. _____ Y N

If you don't like this person, what don't you like about him or her?

3. Name _____

☐ stranger ☐ someone you know but aren't close to ☐ good friend

List the top three qualities that make that person popular.

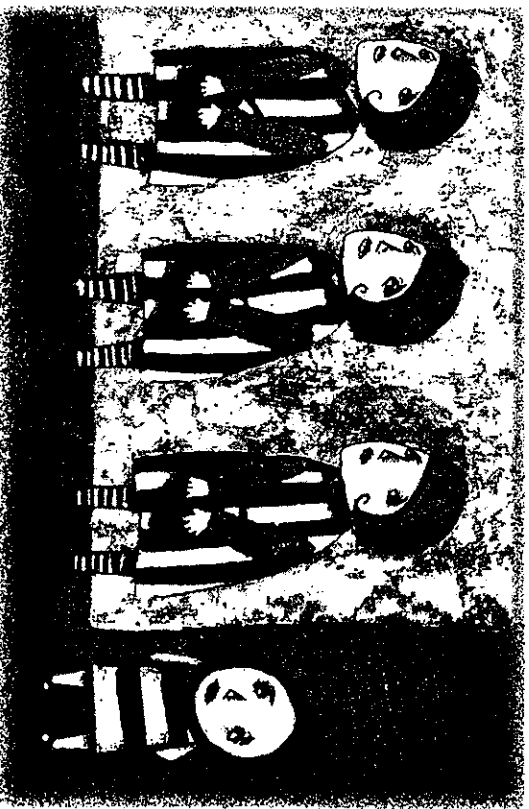
a. _____ Y N b. _____ Y N c. _____ Y N

If you don't like this person, what don't you like about him or her?

Now think about yourself. Are the qualities you admire in popular people qualities you have, too? If not, are they qualities you could work to develop in yourself? Look at your reasons for not liking a popular person. You can't be the only one who sees this person's bad side. Could it be that popular people are not perfect, just as you are not perfect? That they are popular is because they emphasize their best qualities? Think about it.

Finally, when you see people who are popular, do you feel pressure to change yourself to be more like them?

Groups and Labels



Think about your peers at school. If the name of a classmate comes up and you're asked to describe him or her, chances are you would do it with a label -- "he's a jock," "she's a brain," etc.

Probably he hangs out with a group of kids you call "the jocks", and she hangs out with a group you call "the brains". A group label somehow gets attached to everyone in it. Which social group would your classmates say you belong to? Now, think about how you fit -- or don't fit-- the label.

One of the most powerful parts of peer pressure is the way kids label other kids. Do you, like being labeled? In fact, all labels are too simple. Every person is much too complicated to be defined by one quality or interest.

The social groups at your school may be called "crowds" or "cliques" (pronounced: "clicks"). In some schools, kids pay a lot of attention to which cliques they're in. At other schools, it's less important.

Good and Bad Cliques

Cliques have their good and bad points. It's nice to have the feeling of belonging that goes with being part of a group. (Why do you think some wealthy adults join country clubs?) Cliques can be a lot of fun and a good way for teens to have fun in their groups without pitting off into the boy-girl thing.

But there are other things about tight social groups that aren't so great. Sometimes cliques make people who are on the outside feel like losers. They can also make it harder for people in the clique to get to know other people outside it.

Most important, cliques can create strong peer pressure to do or say what the group does. Group members may feel it's so important to blend in that they use the speech patterns and follow the fashions of the group's unofficial leaders.

The most extreme kind of cliques are gangs, in which violent behavior and loyalty to the gang are the most important thing to members. Gangs pressure members to give up other friends, and sometimes, even to turn away from family members. And gangs use the threat of violence to make it very difficult for people to get out once they join.

Being part of most cliques, though, is not a lifetime commitment. Your membership in a school social group doesn't have a thing to do with the adult life you'll lead. Some of the most successful people in world felt like outsiders during their teenage years.

Which In-Crowd?

A tight social group -- a clique -- or a crowd -- can create a lot of pressure on its members to conform.

Look at the friends you hang out with in school. List the things the people in this group have in common.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

CHECK OUT THE NEWS!

1. Cliques or groups that exclude people sometimes make news. Look through the news sections of the *Morning News* and find a group that does this. Write a sentence explaining why the group excludes others. Write another stating how this makes people who are excluded feel.

2. A sports team is a kind of clique, although sometimes people don't see it that way. In schools, kids are cut from the varsity. In the pros, players are constantly being replaced. Write a paragraph explaining how this kind of "clique" is a positive or negative thing. Or can it be both?

3. When people are excluded, they sometimes feel their rights have been violated. If a restaurant refused to seat you because you were a member of a certain ethnic group, that would be a violation. In the news, find an example of an exclusion that would be a violation of rights. Then see if you can find one that you think is not a violation of rights. What is the key to whether it is a violation of rights?

Your Appearance and Body Image



Many students in school are unhappy with the size and shape of their bodies. You think you're too late. Or too skinny. Or too short. Or too tall. You find fault with your nose, your teeth, your eyes, your hair.

And sometimes, classmates may pressure you about your appearance.

It's normal to want to look attractive. But American's heavy emphasis on looks can be harmful. Many women, for example, think they have to have a fashion model's face and shape to feel good and be loved. Many men who are not naturally strong and athletic end up thinking that they are "less manly" than others.

Every year Americans spend millions of dollars to improve their looks. Commercials on TV always try to make us think we should be doing more to beautify our hair, skin and body. The truth is they're just trying to get us to buy more stuff!

So Many Shapes!

Healthy, attractive, happy people come in all sizes and shapes. Unless you are an identical twin, your appearance is unique -- yours alone to feel good about for its one-of-a-kindness. Keep these thoughts in mind when you stand in front of a mirror.

Your looks are a combination of traits you inherited from your parents. But you're not a finished work -- yet. As you go through the rapid, and sometimes uneven growth phases, try to think of your appearance like a work in progress. Like the Ugly Duckling in children's story, you just might turn out to be a swan.

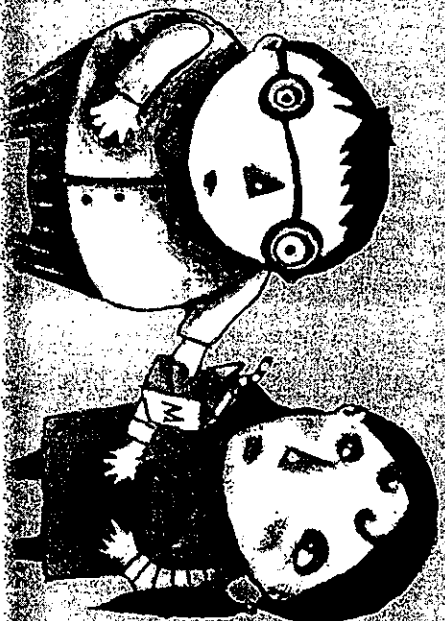
Pressure Time

But face it. As you go through school, you have to deal with the fact that teens say some incredibly mean things about each other's appearance. And sometimes the cruelest people are the ones with the biggest inner doubts about their own looks.

This is a nasty form of peer pressure. If you're on the receiving end of cruel remarks, try not to take it to heart. Even if you don't turn out to be a swan, you'll find as you get older that ordinary-looking people with good hearts are often more admired than beautiful faces.

CHECK OUT THE NEWS!

1. Beauty products are among the most heavily advertised in America. Look through the ads in today's *Morning News* and find ads for five beauty products or aids. Next to each on a sheet of paper, list what the product is expected to do, what standard of "beauty" it represents and whether it is realistic to expect it to satisfy the user.
2. Pick a beauty or health product you or your family has used from the ads in the paper. Write a consumer review of the product. Be sure to mention what the product was supposed to do, and be specific, detailing how well it worked.
3. Models are used to help sell products in ads. Look through the ads in today's *Morning News*. Pick two ads, one showing a male model, and one showing a female model. For each, write a sentence or two stating whether the model represents what most people look like. Finish by writing what image of beauty the model is supposed to show.



Uniquely You

Don't like the way you look? Well, there must be something to like in the many features that make up your appearance. Using the list below, mark "like" or "don't like" beside each feature. If you mark "like", write what you like about this feature on the line provided. If you mark "don't", write what you can do to change or play down this feature. If there's nothing you can do about it, write instead the name of a person you admire who has the same "problem" feature.

Feature	Like	Don't	Comment
Eyes	()	()	_____
Nose	()	()	_____
Mouth	()	()	_____
Teeth	()	()	_____
Chin	()	()	_____
Cheeks	()	()	_____
Ears	()	()	_____
Skin	()	()	_____
Hair	()	()	_____
Chest	()	()	_____
Waist	()	()	_____
Hips	()	()	_____
Arms	()	()	_____
Hands	()	()	_____
Thighs	()	()	_____
Calves	()	()	_____
Feet	()	()	_____

Pressure Comments

In school, people are very sensitive about their looks. And both boys and girls are very blunt about their opinions. How often have you heard someone say "That haircut makes you look like a geek!" Or "that shirt does NOTHING for you."

Sometimes kids actually try to pressure others to change their looks or clothes. Poll your class. How many people have been "ranked out" for their looks or how their bodies looked in what they were wearing? How many were pressured to change in some way? Draw a bar graph that will show both results.

Are the results different for boys and for girls? Add up the results in a boy column and a girl column. Draw a second graph showing the results.

Skin Care

One of the most sensitive issues for kids going through puberty is acne. And it can be the object of some painful peer pressure.

Pimples. Whiteheads. Blackheads. Fight out of every 10 people get acne during puberty. If one of your parents had acne as a teen, there is a good chance you will too.

During puberty, the oil glands under your skin start making more sebum (SRE-bum), a white, oily liquid that rises to the skin surface through tiny ducts. Sebum's purpose is to keep your skin moist. But whiteheads or blackheads can result if the sebum gets stuck in the ducts.

If a duct gets infected, it becomes the red, swollen, pus-filled thing we call acne, a pimple or a zit. Ducts often get infected when you squeeze a whitehead or blackhead to pop out the gunk -- especially if your face and hands weren't cleaned before you started. Squeezing can make the duct break, releasing the infected sebum under your skin and spreading the infection around your face.

The skin of some African Americans is prone to abnormal scar tissue called keloids (KEE-loids). In people who get keloids popping a pimple can leave a bad scar.

If you have a mild case of acne, you may want to try a cream or lotion that contains benzoyl peroxide. Such products can be found in any drug store. New acne-fighting medicines are available with a doctor's prescription. To keep acne in check, wash your face daily with a mild soap and avoid cosmetics that have oil in them.

Personal Grooming

Another source of peer embarrassment is...uh oh...B.O. Body Odor. During puberty your sweat glands become more active. You perspire more in places where you have many sweat glands: under your arms, the bottom of your feet and between your legs.

The changes that take place during puberty make your sweat stronger than when you were a child.

To control body odor, take a bath or shower every day. You also may want to use a deodorant to reduce body odor and/or an antiperspirant to control wetness (sweating). Some products are a combination of deodorant and antiperspirant (read the product label).

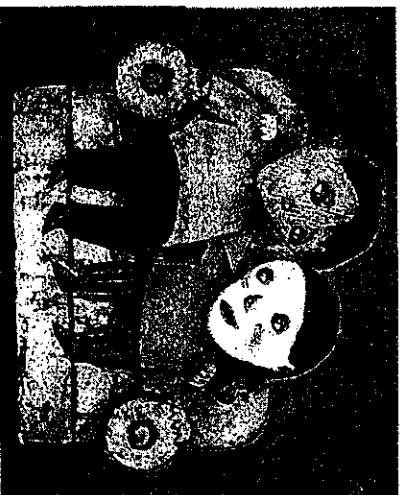
Whichever product you use, remember they are no substitute for soap and water.

What Parents can Do...

What Do I Do?

By KEITH D. ELLER

Parents around the globe are scratching their heads trying to figure out the answer to the question, "What do I do?" Peer pressure is a topic that often comes up when issues facing adolescents are discussed. It is usually thought of as the negative influence on an adolescent as they struggle to find their own identity. Although negative peer pressure is a concern you as a parent can counter the influence if you are willing to be a vital and meaningful part of your child's life.



You have a powerful position in your child's life. Research on peer pressure that was conducted in Orange County, California involving more than 16,000 school children, found that it was *family members*, not classmates or teachers, who had the biggest influence on whether children used drugs, alcohol or tobacco. The crucial issue at stake is whether you are willing to do the hard work necessary to be a positive influence on your child.

There is so much that you can do to help your teen develop positive attitudes and a productive life. First and foremost, *develop a strong relationship* with your teen. This foundation will determine the impact of peer pressure. An active parent-child relationship should be a balance of love and acceptance along with structure, rules and discipline. Love is cultivated as you spend time with your adolescent and involve them in family activities.

Communication between you and your child is key in order to insure that you feel connected to one another. You must not only talk with your child, but also listen to and understand their joys and struggles. This lets your teen know they are important and valuable.

Encourage your child and build their sense of value and worth. This will help them develop a strong, positive self-image that enables them to stand strong against the pull of negative "friends" and culture. Talk with your child about their friends and know who their friends are and where they go when they are out of the house.

Structure and discipline are crucial during this stage of adolescent development. Kids that grow up with rules and consequences eventually will develop discipline and control in their own lives. Helpful rules for adolescents include asking permission to go out, along with informing you of where they are going, whom they will be with and when they will be home.

Set a good example. This is another important element in guiding an adolescent who is not easily affected by their peers. Adolescents often learn more from what they see than what they hear. A discussion about the problems of smoking will have no impact if you are smoking at the same time. Along with setting a good example is the need to instill your teen with a strong ethical and moral conscience that will provide a compass for their journey through life.

Peer Pressure is not always negative and you are wise to *involve your teen* with other teens and activities that are a positive influence. Examples of positive activities include school sports, the marching band, scouting, community volunteer work or a church youth group. Involving your child in a group of peers that have constructive activities and positive attitudes and values will lead your child in a similar way.

What should you do if you think your child is involved with the wrong peer group? Intervene with your teen by being assertive and firm. This can be done effectively if you are already involved in their lives and have open lines of communication. Don't hesitate to seek professional help if you see your teen being influenced in negative ways that are destroying their positive values, attitudes and life goals.

Peer pressure doesn't have to be a major teenage dilemma. The real issue is having confidence as a parent and instilling confidence in your child. *Love your child*, despite differences in music and hairstyle, and keep the lines of communication open. This will require commitment and work on your part, but it's worth the effort. The result is having a child who is able to handle the negative peer pressure because their life has security, purpose and direction.

Keith Eller is a psychiatric case manager at the Hamot Institute for Behavioral Health.

Tips for Parents of Athletes

By TOM FABRIZIO

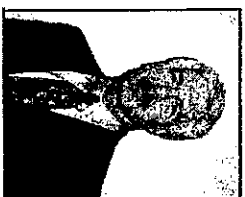
I'd like to share with you a few thoughts on children playing sports -- and the parents who love them. I have been charged with this task certainly not for any expertise, but because I am both a coach and a parent of young children. If we, as parents, take the time to reflect on our own youth, these simple suggestions will make a little sense.

- **No means no.** If a child tells you they don't want to play a certain sport, you are in for many heartaches and headaches if you impose the "play because I said so" rule.
- **Winning and losing.** We all want to win. It seems to be a burning human instinct. However, we can't all be winners all the time. Teach your children how to learn from their shortcomings. They aren't failures because they lost "the big game." Learning how to lose is as equally important as how we learn to win. Ask them what they could have done differently to change the outcome next time. Most importantly, there will be a next time!

Really Listen to Your Kids

By MICHAEL APPELBEER, M.S.S.A., L.S.W.

A walk through your child's school halls proves that peer pressure is the strongest during these years. Look at their clothing: read the labels. Notice the athletic shoes they're wearing. Listen to the way they talk. Look at their hair. If you think that they look and sound alike, you are right. Most kids go out of their way to identify with some group of peers in their school. Now, take a walk through the halls of your high school yearbook!



Peer groups offer independence from parents by providing an intimate personal life outside the family. This sought independence from the family is a normal task during this developmental stage. The key here for parents is to be the safety net to support and guide your adolescent through this passage. Your relationship with your adolescent is very important.

While it is natural for parents and teens to spend less time together as they pass through adolescence, it is dangerous to assume that it is all right to avoid making the time to spend as a family. Parents who choose to become over-involved in work, recreation and other outside activities are also making the choice to spend less time with the family. As a result, they open the door for their teens to spend more time living with and listening to their peer group.

Below are some specific strategies to help you counter the influence of peer pressure in the life of your adolescent and teen:

- Know your adolescent -- what types of music they like; who their role models are; who their friends are; what they like and dislike.
- Spend time with your adolescent doing the things they enjoy. Find common tasks/interests.
- Open up your home to your adolescent's friends. Make friends with your kid's friends.
- Listen -- do not lecture. Parents should set this parameter beforehand. Ask your adolescent if they want you to just listen or do they want you to provide feedback.
- Communicate on a feeling level with your adolescent. Use "I" statements such as, "I feel..." Adults tend to deal with things on a thinking/logical level.
- Help your adolescent develop a positive self-image. They want to feel like they belong. They want to avoid the pain of being left out. They walk a fine line between conviction and compromise. When push comes to shove, acceptance by the crowd is more important in the decision-making process than personal convictions and values.
- Praise your adolescent for accomplishments. Kids who pass through adolescence, already unsure of themselves, can imagine no worse fate than feeling insecure and unsure of themselves.
- Give responsibilities that show trust. Parents should work to strike a balance between too much and too little freedom. Give your kids the opportunity to make their own choices with clearly defined boundaries.

In summary, think carefully, through the time, love and energy you spend with your kids. No matter what age we are, we can expect to face negative peer pressure from the day we are born until the day we die. Each of us will experience it in different ways and degrees, depending on our own life experience, peer group and self-image. But at no time in the life cycle is negative peer pressure greater than during the confusing years our children spend between childhood and adulthood. Parents who realize the strong influence of peer pressure will be wise guides and guards of their kids.

Michael Appelbeer is an outpatient therapist at the Hamot Institute for Behavioral Health and the director of community-based programs for Perseus House. Some material adapted from Walt Mueller, *Understanding Today's Youth Culture*, 1994.

- **Referees and/or Officials.** We all feel a need to blame others for our own misgivings. The obvious person at the time would be the person who seems to be "out to get us" during the course of a game...the referee! We, as parents and coaches, have to teach our children to respect these individuals. The more we scream about the officiating at sporting events, the more it becomes acceptable to our children. To my knowledge, no referee has ever changed a call to benefit a rude parent, coach or spectator. Let's practice our own self-control.

- **Sports and fun.** Why do we play sports? For the money? For the press clippings? For the glory? The last time I checked, it was for exercise, for interaction with our peers; to help us develop our socialization skills; and of course, for fun!

Get your children interested in sports because it's fun and they just may surprise you!

Tom Fabrizio is the head coach of the St. Peter Cathedral C.Y.O. basketball team, former assistant coach of the Sacred Heart Chargers football team, board member of the Diocesan Athletic Board and professional umpire for the Bayview Softball League.